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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire was distributed to teachers of reporting in U.S. schools and departments of journalism in order to provide editors and others interested in journalism education with an indication of the contents and scope of basic newswriting and reporting courses offered in colleges and universities. The questionnaire attempted to reveal the following about these basic courses: (1) the level of students the course is focused at, (2) the background of the instructors assigned to these courses, (3) the nature, structure, and content of the courses, (4) the degree of emphasis given to various topics in the lectures and discussion sections, (5) the frequency of labs and writing situations, (6) the processing of student copy, and (7) the evaluation of student achievement. Statistical data based on the responses to the survey are given in table form. A selection of teacher comments and suggestions for the improvement of basic newswriting courses is included. (LL)

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HOW BASIC NEWSWRITING COURSES ARE TAUGHT AT THE SCHOOLS AND DEPARTMENTS OF JOURNALISM

by

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WHY THIS STUDY WAS CONDUCTED

During the early periods of American Journalism the training of newcomers to the field was the sole responsibility of the editor – who was usually also compositor, ad-taker, and pressman as well. Both the printer's devil and the novice reporter got their indoctrination to the business quite literally on-the-job.

For most newspaper back shop jobs the apprentice system is still in effect. But to an increasing degree in recent decades editors have turned over to the schools the task of providing the basic general and professional education of prospects for the news staff.

The editors nevertheless retain a lively interest in the nature and the results of the schools' efforts, particularly in the professional area. And the editors often differ with the educators in their respective evaluations of the success of the programs of journalism education, as measured by the capabilities of the graduates of such programs who go into the newsrooms.

The degree to which the editors and the educators sometimes vary in their perceptions of the goals and the accomplishments of schools of journalism was revealed in the results of a 1971 ANPA Foundation study. (See ANPA News Research Bulletin No. 12, Sept. 16, 1971, "What Editors and Journalism Educators Expect from Journalism Education," by John L. Hulteng.) The study indicated that most educators were far more optimistic about the abilities of their graduates than were the editors who hired those graduates. The findings of the study also revealed that the editors had significant misconceptions about the way in which journalism education was carried out on the campuses.

As a logical sequel to the 1971 survey, the ANPA Foundation in 1972 commissioned a study of the basic newswriting and reporting course as it is now taught in the schools and departments of journalism with accredited programs. The objective of the study was to assemble some descriptive data that would fill in a picture of this one aspect of journalism education – the beginning course that many educators regard as the keystone element in the professional preparation of the journalist. What is the content of such courses? Who teaches the courses? What approaches are used? What resources are employed? What priorities are stressed?

HOW THE STUDY WAS CONDUCTED

A questionnaire containing 54 items was developed, pre-tested, and then distributed to all of the faculty members listed in the 1972 *Journalism Educator* directory as teachers of reporting in the schools and departments of journalism with sequences accredited by the American Council on Education for Journalism. There were 222 such persons listed.

Since the *JE* directory identifies only general areas of specialization of faculty members, it had to be assumed that the group of 222 listed as teachers of reporting necessarily included many who taught advanced courses, rather than the basic course with which this study was concerned. Such persons were asked to respond to the questionnaire with a simple "This doesn't apply to me" form enclosed with the questionnaire.

Responses of some kind were received from 165 of those to whom the questionnaire was sent; this represented a response rate of 74 per cent. Of the 165 responses, 57 were from persons who indicated that they did not teach the basic course and thus were unable to fill out the full questionnaire. If these 57 are subtracted from the original group of 222, there is left a potential total of 165 persons who theoretically did teach the basic course and thus could complete the questionnaire. Since 108 completed questionnaires were received, the response rate from those eligible to respond was 65 per cent. (The true response rate was

almost certainly higher, since it could reasonably be assumed that at least some of the 57 persons who did not respond in any way were ones who did not teach the basic course but who failed to send back the "doesn't apply to me" form.

Responses of some kind were received from teachers at 93 per cent of the schools and departments of journalism with accredited programs; fully completed questionnaires were received from teachers at 91 per cent of such schools. This suggests that the data provide a reasonably accurate indication of the nature of the basic newswriting and reporting course as it is taught at accredited programs.

HOW THE COURSE FITS INTO THE CURRICULUM

At most of the accredited schools, the basic newswriting and reporting course is apparently designed for second-year students. To the question: "At what level is the course listed in your catalog?" 78 percent of the respondents checked the answer "sophomore," 18 per cent checked "junior," and 4 per cent checked "freshman." None checked "senior."

At most institutions, too, the course is offered on a one-term basis: 54 per cent of the respondents reported that at their schools it was a one-semester course; 31 per cent reported it as a one-quarter course; 3 per cent reported that it was offered as a two-quarter package; and 12 per cent indicated that it constituted a full-year sequence.

The respondents listed 29 different titles under which the course is listed in various institutional catalogs, but an overwhelming majority (nearly 80 per cent) listed either "News Writing" or "Reporting" or some combination of the two. "News Writing," with 22 listings, was the leading title. Most of the other titles were listed by only one or two respondents; they included such variations as "Verbal Communications," "The Art of Communications" and "Communications Writing."

It would seem that the basic course is reasonably accessible to students at the accredited schools, to judge by the frequency with which it is offered. To the question: "How many times is the course offered during an academic year at your institution? (Count multiple offerings or multiple sections in a single term or semester as separate offerings but exclude summer session offerings.)," the following responses were made:

1 or 2 times a year	17%
3 to 5 times	20%
6 to 10 times	38%
more than 10 times	25%

One respondent indicated that the basic course is available in 30 separate offerings during a single academic year at his institution, one with a very large enrollment.

Academic credit is assigned to courses at most institutions in terms of credit hours, either semester hours or quarter hours depending on the calendar used. For purposes of comparison, these can be converted to quarter hours (one semester hour is the equivalent of 1½ quarter hours) and this was done with the respondents' answer to the question: "What total academic credit does the course carry?"

3 quarter hours	12%
4 quarter hours	18%
4½ quarter hours	45%
5 quarter hours	7%
6 quarter hours	6%
more than 6 quarter hours	12%

These allocations of credit to the basic newswriting and reporting course may be viewed in perspective when it is remembered that at an institution using the quarter system (to which all responses were converted) a student must accumulate a total of from 180 to 185 quarter credits in order to qualify for a bachelor's degree. And at the schools of journalism with accredited programs the block of quarter credits allocated to journalism courses is typically 45 or fewer. Thus at about 60 per cent of the institutions represented by the respondents, the basic newswriting and reporting course constituted approximately 10 per cent of the total number of journalism hours in a student's program, and about 2.5 per cent of his overall credit total. Nearly

80 per cent of the respondents reported that the course is required for all undergraduate journalism majors at their institutions.

WHO TEACHES THE COURSE?

Several of the items in the questionnaire had to do with the background of the instructors assigned to teach the basic course in reporting and newswriting. These items, and the responses in percentages, provide the basis for a broad-stroke profile of the instructors who teach the course. The responses are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
A profile of the instructor of the basic newswriting and reporting course.

22. How much full-time professional journalistic experience have you had, in calendar years?

None	up to 2 years	2 to 5 years	5 to 10 years	10 to 15 years	more than 15 years
0%	7%	20%	25%	25%	23%

23. How much teaching experience have you had, in academic years?

0 to 2 years	3 to 5 years	5 to 10 years	10 to 15 years	more than 15 years
7%	18%	32%	18%	25%

24. What is your present academic rank?

Instructor	Asst. professor	Assoc. professor	professor	Other
3%	34%	32%	30%	1%

25. What is your highest earned degree?

None	bachelor's	master's	doctor's
4%	8%	46%	42%

Some points about the Table 1 statistics are particularly worth noting. Nearly three-fourths of the respondents have had at least five years of full-time professional journalistic experience. A full three-quarters of them have had at least five years of teaching experience. And more than 60 per cent of them hold one of the two senior academic ranks, associate or full professor. These data seem to refute some of the critical generalizations that are sometimes made about the lack of experience, or academic rank, of the persons who staff the basic courses in journalism schools.

Several caveats ought to be entered at this point, however. It should be remembered that the responses in this study came from the schools with accredited programs, not from any which had not met accrediting standards. Secondly, 57 of the 222 persons listed in the *JE* directory as teachers of the basic course at the schools with accredited programs made no response of any kind to the questionnaire; this group may well have been made up largely of low-ranking or part-time instructors with much less experience than that reported by the respondents. Thirdly, it should be kept in mind that the profile statistics before us refer to the person who serves as the principal instructor for the course. How much of the course does the principal instructor actually teach? How much does he turn over to less well backgrounded assistants?

Other items in the questionnaire sought to probe into these points. To one such item, asking whether the respondent typically had any kind of assistance when he taught the course, 76 per cent answered "no" and 24 per cent "yes."

Of those who answered yes, 40 per cent indicated that the assistance came from other faculty members, 43 per cent indicated that graduate teaching fellows provided the assistance, and 17 per cent indicated that undergraduate teaching assistants were used.

The conclusion suggested by these last figures, taken with those in the preceding paragraph, is that approximately 86 per cent of the respondents either taught the course without assistance, or were assisted by other persons of faculty rank. Only 14 per cent of the respondents indicated that teaching assistants played any part in the course as it was taught at their institutions.

Another question asked: "When you teach this course, what proportion of your total course load does this course represent?" And the responses were:

1/4 of the total load	19%
1/3 of the total load	51%
1/2 of the total load	21%
2/3 of the total load	4%
3/4 of the total load	0%
entire load	5%

(Those responding that the course represented 1/2 or more of their total teaching load usually also added that they directed multi-section offerings of the course.)

The 1971 ANPA Foundation study of editors' and educators' perceptions of journalism education revealed that the editors strongly favored the use of professional newsmen as resource persons or guest lecturers in journalism courses. One of the questions asked in the present study was: "Do you use non-academic professionals from the local or nearby press to help with the course?" and to that question 57 per cent of the respondents answered "yes" and 43 per cent "no."

Of those teachers who did use professionals, nearly all used them either as guest lecturers (49 per cent) or as interview subjects for their classes (38 per cent). In 80 per cent of the cases where professionals were used, they were unpaid for their participation in the course; in the other 20 per cent of the cases, where the professionals were on the academic payroll, they were in nearly every case responsible for teaching a laboratory section or an entire offering of the course.

Some further insight into the degree to which the principal instructor actually did teach the course may be found in responses to questions dealing with the processing and evaluation of students' work, detailed a a later section of this report.

HOW THE COURSE IS OFFERED

Much of the questionnaire dealt with the nature, structure, and content of the basic newswriting and reporting course. The respondents were asked about the emphasis put on lecture and laboratory sessions, the topics taken up in both, the approaches used in the lab and outside writing assignments, and text and other resources used as a basis for the course.

One set of questions focused on the size of classes, particularly lab classes. Instructors often complain that their writing classes are too large to be practicable, and students also object to large lab sections on the ground that their work gets too little individual attention. Respondents to the study indicated the following range of class size in laboratory sections (lecture sessions were typically a good deal larger):

Fewer than 15 students	19%
15 to 20 students	45%
21 to 25 students	14%
26 to 30 students	4%
31 to 35 students	2%
36 to 40 students	5%
more than 40 students	11%

Accrediting teams making visits to journalism schools usually are critical of writing courses with enrollments of more than 15 to 20 students in laboratory sections; larger enrollments are considered to be in violation of the accrediting standards. Yet 36 per cent of the respondents reported laboratory sections with enrollments of more than 20 students.

Item no. 11 in the questionnaire asked how many class hours per week were typically allocated to lecture and discussion in the basic newswriting and reporting course. The responses;

one hour	25%
two hours	50%
three hours	16%
four hours	5%
five hours	3%
six hours	0%
more than six hours	1%

The next item asked how many class hours per week were typically allocated to laboratory sessions:

one hour	7%
two hours	31%
three hours	26%
four hours	24%
five hours	6%
six hours	3%
more than six hours	3%

A question about the required or primary text used for the course brought responses listing 19 different texts. The favored texts, by number of mentions were:

Text, author	No. of times mentioned
Interpretative Reporting, Curtis Macdougall	27
Reporting, Mitchell Charnely	24
The Professional Journalist, John Hohenberg	11
Fundamentals of News Reporting, Izard, Culbertson, Lambert	10

Another 10 respondents reported that they used no primary or required text for the course.

A similar question about supplementary texts used for the course brought responses listing 28 different texts, either singly or in combination. Those most frequently mentioned were:

Text, author	No. of times mentioned
The AP-UPI Stylebook,	38
The Elements of Style, William Strunk, Jr., and E.B. White	17
Reporting, Charnley	8
Watch Your Language, Theodore Bernstein	7

CONTENT OF THE COURSE: LECTURES

Question No. 26 in the study asked the respondents to indicate the degree of emphasis given to various topics in the lecture and discussion aspect of the basic newswriting and reporting course. The responses, by percentages, and grouped in collapsed columns, are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Degree of emphasis given to various topics
in the lecture/discussion aspect of the basic newswriting
and reporting course.

	A great deal or Quite a lot	Some	Not very much or Almost none
News gathering techniques	76%	18%	6%
News writing techniques (story structure, transitions)	95%	5%	0%
Lead writing	87%	11%	2%
News writing style (sentence length, readability, clarity)	93%	7%	0%
Interviewing techniques	64%	27%	9%
History of Journalism	3%	8%	89%
Legal hazards (libel, privacy)	19%	52%	29%
Diction (choice of words)	60%	30%	10%
Syntax (parallelism, placement of modifiers, sentence emphasis)	65%	25%	10%
Spelling	66%	24%	10%
News judgment	90%	9%	1%
Ethics	53%	32%	15%
Communication theory	12%	14%	74%
Audience analysis	1%	31%	68%
Journalistic careers	10%	31%	59%
Current issues in reporting and newswriting (e.g., "new journalism")	21%	56%	23%

In addition to the listed responses, some of the persons answering the questionnaire wrote in other topics to which they gave attention in the lecture and discussion aspect of the course. Among those mentioned more than once: polling methods, features, professional values, deadlines.

Some of the respondents pointed out that in the curricula at their institutions such topics as history, law, communication theory, and ethics were included in separate courses and thus did not figure significantly in the subject matter of the basic newswriting and reporting course.

CONTENT OF THE COURSE: LAB SESSIONS

Respondents were asked to indicate how frequently they made use of various kinds of writing situations in structuring the laboratory sessions as the basic newswriting and reporting course. Their answers are presented in Table 3.

Those respondents who indicated that they made use of standardized writing situations presented to the students in a laboratory setting (simulated news situations) were asked to indicate how often they used various kinds of approaches in this phase of the laboratory work of the course. Their answers are presented in Table 4.

Table 3
Frequency with which various writing situations are used
in the laboratory aspect of the newswriting and reporting course.

	More often than once a week	Once a week	Every other week	3 or 4 times a term	Not at all
Standardized, simulated news situations set up in the lab itself	32%	25%	7%	23%	13%
Actual news events covered on the campus	11%	24%	15%	43%	7%
Actual news events covered off the campus	4%	12%	12%	38%	34%
Beat assignments on campus	9%	3%	3%	7%	78%
Beat assignments off campus	3%	1%	2%	9%	85%

Table 4
Frequency with which various methods of setting up simulated news situations
in the laboratory are used by instructors in the basic newswriting and reporting course.

	More often than once a week	Once a week	Every other week	3 or 4 times a term	Not at all
Dittoed handouts	26%	23%	12%	28%	11%
A published workbook	7%	6%	3%	3%	81%
Instructor simulates news sources	7%	13%	15%	43%	22%
Teaching assistant simulated news sources	0%	2%	2%	7%	89%
Students role-play news sources	1%	0%	0%	24%	75%
Instructor or T/A dictates details verbally	7%	8%	10%	32%	41%
Outside guests serve as interview subjects	1%	5%	7%	66%	21%
Audio tapes	1%	3%	3%	40%	53%
Video tapes	0%	0%	1%	13%	86%

Only three other approaches were mentioned by respondents: speaker phone interviews, programmed instruction, and use of AP wire copy as the basis for news stories, and each was mentioned only once.

Perhaps the most significant column in Table 4 is the last one. It suggests considerable decline in the use of workbooks, continued dependence on dittoed handouts, and limited experimentation with such devices as audio tapes, video tapes, and programmed instruction in setting up laboratory writing situations. Presumably the costs involved in these last three devices constitute a deterrent to many instructors who might otherwise want to make use of them.

A follow-up question on laboratory approaches asked:

"Most newswriting situations in the classroom or laboratory, however they are set up, typically involve several different kinds of problems for the students to cope with in covering and writing the story. If you

employ news situations designed to pose particular problems, please indicate which kinds of problems you emphasize: check only if you have devised story situations particularly focused on these problems."

The problems, ranked in order of the number of times they were cited by respondents:

Assessing news values	85
Accuracy	82
Dealing with quotes	76
Organizing complex details	75
Avoidance of libel	59
Organizing action sequences	53
Balance	48
Avoidance of reporter bias	45
Coping with problems of taste	41
Avoidance of invasion of privacy	15

Others mentioned moré than once: interview techniques, attribution, clarity, conciseness, deadline pressures.

Respondents who indicated that they had their students cover news writing situations outside the laboratory were asked to indicate what kinds of situations they used, and how frequently they used them. Their responses are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Frequency with which writing situations outside the classroom were used by instructors in the basic newswriting and reporting course.

	More often than once a week	Once a week	Every other week	3 or 4 times a term	Not at all
Meeting on campus	6%	11%	20%	46%	17%
Speeches on campus	6%	10%	22%	55%	7%
Student government	3%	2%	3%	11%	81%
Beat coverage on campus	6%	8%	1%	9%	76%
Downtown government	2%	4%	6%	26%	62%
Downtown speeches	4%	6%	7%	31%	52%
Downtown meetings	4%	7%	8%	25%	56%
Downtown beat coverage	2%	3%	0%	2%	93%
Downtown interviews	3%	11%	9%	47%	30%

The responses, particularly those in the last column of the table, suggest the considerable reliance of the instructors on easily-monitored, on-campus events, such as meetings and speeches. Beat coverage, with the necessity for elaborate organization, is obviously not a favored device with most of the instructors who responded to the quetsionnaire.

PROCESSING STUDENT COPY

What happens to student stories after they are written is a key consideration in any evaluation of the basic newswriting and reporting course. For in the processing of student copy by the instructor, and in the explanation to the student of changes and corrections made in his copy, much of the learning experience in a

writing course takes place. Several items in the questionnaire dealt with this aspect of the course.

Question No. 31 asked the respondents to indicate how many writing assignments would be completed by a student during a typical term of the basic newswriting and reporting course. Their answers:

Less than 10	3%
10 to 19	17%
20 to 29	36%
30 to 39	16%
40 or more	23%

Three respondents reported that students in their courses completed 100 writing assignments during a single term!

Most of the instructors responding to the questionnaire indicated that the typical writing assignment used was one that the student could cover and write during a single lab period (one to three hours) against deadline pressure. Most respondents, however, also indicated that at least some of the assignments were more extensive, covering several lab periods and resulting in an investigative series rather than a single news article.

Several questions asked in detail about the processing of student copy. These questions, and the responses to them in perecntages, are presented in Table 6.

Table 6
The number of student writing assignments subjected
to various kinds of processing in the basic newswriting and reporting course.

	None	One-fourth	One-half	Three-fourths	All
Of the total number of writing assignments completed by students during an offering of the course, about how many would be edited, corrected, and handed back to the students?	0%	2%	4%	5%	89%
Of the total number that would be corrected and edited, about how many would be corrected and edited by the principal instructor for the course?	2%	8%	3%	7%	80%
About how many of the total number of writing assignments completed would be assigned a grade?	3%	4%	6%	38%	49%
About how many of the total number of writing assignments completed would be critiqued and discussed for the class as a whole?	3%	31%	15%	23%	28%

These data suggest that students in the basic writing course do very little writing for the wastebasket; virtually all of their copy is processed, and 80 per cent of it is handled by the principal instructor for the course. There is considerable variation in approach with respect to grading (a few respondents reported that they do not use grades at all, except for the final course grade) and in the critiquing of student copy for the benefit of the entire class. Some instructors indicated that they preferred to make corrections and comments only for the individual student concerned, while others felt that the entire class gained from general discussion of editing changes and corrections.

Some follow-up questions probed further into the methods used by the instructors in processing student copy. Question 37 asked those respondents who did critique student copy for the class as a whole to indicate what methods they used. Their answers:

Instructor reads copy to class, noting corrections	69%
Transparencies of corrected stories shown on projector	41%
Corrected stories are dittoed and distributed to entire class	34%
Uncorrected stories are dittoed, distributed to entire class, and corrected in general class discussion	18%
Corrected stories are left in an open file for students to examine	6%

Other approaches mentioned: opaque projector used to show corrected copy to class; instructor's comments (not original copy) dittoed for distribution to class.

The favored critique method -- the instructor reading copy aloud to the class and noting corrections -- is perhaps the most time-consuming. It may also be less efficient than other methods in that not all members of the class may hear and understand the instructor's comments. Presumably the cost and preparation time involved in using more efficient approaches inhibit their more widespread adoption.

How quickly students get feedback from their newswriting efforts is a significant factor in the learning experience. One question in the study asked the respondents to indicate how soon edited and graded copy got back in the students' hands. Their answers:

Before the next class meeting	10%
At the next class meeting	57%
Within a week	28%
Within two weeks	3%
At the next scheduled individual conference with the student	2%

This suggests a commendable pattern of prompt reaction to student effort on the part of nearly all of the instructors responding to the questionnaire.

Question No. 39 asked: "Please indicate what method(s) you use for communicating the instructor's or the TA's criticisms and suggestions to the students (check any that you use)." The responses:

Marginal comments and editing on original copy	97%
Individual conferences with students	81%
Extensive written critiques of original student copy	42%
Use of a standardized check list of common errors and problems	5%
Computerized, programmed exercises	1%

Those respondents who indicated that they relied on the individual conference with a student as a means of communicating criticisms and suggestions were asked how many such conferences would be scheduled with an individual student during a single term of the course. Their answers (in percentages of the group of respondents who did use conferences):

One	8%
Two	34%
Three	12%
Four	6%
Five	3%
Six	5%
more than six	15%
varies	17%

The next question asked the respondents to indicate how much time was allocated to each conference with an individual student. The answers:

Ten minutes or less	10%
Ten minutes to 15 minutes	36%
15 minutes to 30 minutes	34%
More than 30 minutes	4%
Varies	17%

No easy generalizations are possible on the basis of the responses to the questions about the frequency and duration of the individual conferences, since so much would depend on the effectiveness of the instructor's use of the time. It would seem, however, that most students would not gain much from only one or two conferences during a term unless they were comprehensive and of long duration.

A final question about the disposition of student copy asked the respondents to indicate how frequently students were required to rewrite copy, and how often their copy found its way into published form, either on campus or off. The responses to this question are presented in Table 7.

Table 7
Frequency with which student copy is rewritten, or published in campus or off-campus publications.

	Regularly	Some-times	Seldom	Never
Copy returned to student to be rewritten	18%	59%	12%	11%
Copy published in a lab publication	0%	9%	6%	85%
Copy published in a student magazine or newspaper on campus	10%	28%	26%	36%
Copy published in a publication off-campus	3%	21%	18%	58%

Perhaps the only startling statistics in Table 7 are those indicating that nearly a quarter of the respondents require students to rewrite copy seldom or never.

EVALUATION OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Virtually all of the respondents to the study indicated that they used some means of evaluating student accomplishment in the basic newswriting and reporting course. About three-fourths of the respondents used the traditional A, B, C, D, F grading symbols. The others relied on a pass/fail system or some variation of a numerical scale.

More significant than the grading system used wsa the basis of evaluation. Question No. 43 dealt with this point, and the responsess are presented in Table 8.

Table 8
Emphasis placed by instructors on various factors in grading student writing assignments in the basic newswriting and reporting course.

	A great deal or Quite a lot	Some	Not very much or Almost none
Recognition of news values	95%	4%	1%
Writing style (sentence length, clarity, readability)	100%	0%	0%
Accuracy	100%	0%	0%
Spelling	88%	12%	0%
Diction (choice of words)	78%	21%	1%
Syntax (parallelism, placement of modifiers, sentence emphasis)	78%	21%	1%
Transitions	71%	24%	5%
Originality	62%	26%	12%
Lead devices	81%	16%	3%
Organization	94%	6%	0%
Completeness	92%	6%	2%
Fairness	91%	3%	6%
Handling of quotes	88%	10%	2%
Avoidance of jargon	67%	29%	4%

In addition to the responses listed in the questionnaire, some respondents wrote in such factors as enterprise, adherence to deadlines, adherence to style, keeping it brief, making it interesting, and "serving the truth."

Question No. 46 in the study asked the respondents to indicate what kinds of examination approaches they used to evaluate the level of student achievement in the course. Their answers (many checked several responses):

Exams in the form of special, standardized lab exercises	52%
Midterm exams	45%
Final exam	44%
Spot quizzes	34%
Current events quizzes	32%
Exams in the form of assignments to cover news situations away from the lab	15%

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

Although most of the items in the questionnaire used for this study called for selected responses, there were several at the close of the questionnaire that were open-ended. They invited the respondents to comment on the major problems they encountered in teaching the basic newswriting and reporting course, and to suggest ways in which the teaching of the course could be improved.

The responses to these items varied greatly in length (some ran to several pages) and could not easily be quantified. Tables 9 and 10 present responses to two of the open-ended questions, with categories established arbitrarily by the tabulator. The figures in these two tables do not represent percentages, but simply the number of times a given response was mentioned by the 108 respondents.

Table 9
Instructors' citations of chief problems faced
in achieving the objectives of the basic newswriting and reporting course.

	Number of times cited by respondents
Poorly-motivated students, and ones who lack adequate background in English and grammar	37
Not enough time for the course	29
Too many students, classes too large	19
Lack of equipment (e.g., audio-visual, telephones) and inadequate labs	8
Getting students interested in the course	7
Dealing with various levels of students in the same course	7
Lack of adequate assistance	7
Non-majors hold back the pace of the course	2

Table 10
Instructors' suggestions of things teachers might do
to improve the basic newswriting and reporting course.

	Number of times cited by respondents
Do more individual work with students, on their copy and in one-to-one conferences	19
Get away from dependence on sterile, contrived news situations (e.g., handouts)	16
Adapt to new techniques, including programmed instruction	9
Weed out misfit students through entrance examinations	8
Get more student work into print; give students media experience	8
Cut down size of classes	6
Let students learn by doing, cut down lecture aspect	6
Be harder-nosed	4
Require more rewriting	2
Require more newsgathering experiences	2
Mentioned once: more emphasis on fairness and ethics; teachers should go back to field occasionally for refresher training; specify the objectives of the course more clearly; use work books; treat the course as the first, and perhaps the best, professional course.	

The compilations in Tables 9 and 10 do not do justice to the extended comments that many of the respondents included with the questionnaire. There is not enough space in this report to reproduce all of them -- or even a representative sample -- in full. Nor is there space to include the samples of lab exercises and news situations sent in by many of the respondents.

But the report would be incomplete without at least a few excerpts from the open-end comments, since they reveal (as no statistical profile can) how the instructors feel about the course and how they go about their job of teaching it. The excerpts are presented anonymously, as was promised in the cover letter accompanying the questionnaire when it was sent to the respondent group.

Some of the comments suggest how seriously and earnestly the teachers of the basic course approach their work.

From a department chairman: "The block of courses -- newswriting, reporting, editing -- is the crucial thing, each hopefully growing logically out of the other. The first of these is especially important because of what it does to fix attitudes toward your own work as a craftsman and in fixing professional goals."

And from the director of a school of journalism: "With complete prejudice, it is my opinion that the beginning reporting class may be the most difficult class to teach in the whole School of Journalism. I suspect that we will have solved a good many of our problems regarding this course when we have learned to treat it exactly as that."

This same administrator elaborated on those elements that in his judgment were the critical ones in the basic newswriting and reporting courses:

"The quick establishment of an editor-to-reporter rapport that lets the students know that this is a different kind of class.

"A blend of toughness and concern that lets them know that you mean it but you are also reasonable.

"The willingness on the part of the instructor to 'grade' (edit) in great detail, yet teaching all the while with margin and other notes.

"The possibility of getting the students out of the dry run laboratory situation as soon as possible and out writing about real things and real people. (That takes a good deal of extra planning.)

"The establishment of a classroom critique procedure that makes it possible for the students to learn from each other's errors and thus learn more rapidly.

"And in the face of all that, the understanding that it is necessary to build up their morale and keep them excited about journalism as a challenge."

Another respondent, a senior faculty member at a major institution, observed that: "I'm unhappy with the way I and others teach this course, and would welcome a continued national dialogue on the subject. We should be exploring the new currents of general educational thought a lot more, pondering just what is relevant to our task. We are poorly organized for that job."

Some of the open-ended observations detailed approaches taken by the respondents in teaching the basic newswriting and reporting course, and were revealing as to the substantial deployment of manpower and time that at least some institutions make in it. For example, one full professor noted:

"In our lab sessions, I make every student bring his story to me and we go over it together. Then he takes it back and works it over. I also go over each story that the students hand in as their weekly assignments. In addition, I discuss each assignment with the entire class so they can profit by the mistakes of others. We keep our lab sections under 15, so it's a manageable group."

And from another: "We limit enrollment. . .to 20 students and most all of the sections – 13 are scheduled in two semesters next year – are taught by senior faculty. This represents a tremendous investment on our part in this single course. It is tailored as much as possible to individual, almost tutorial treatment."

And one more: "I've taught at three institutions, and the best job of teaching reporting and newswriting I've seen was at Iowa State. Picture this: 22 students in a typing lab. It is 1964. Baiting the students are two associate professors and one assistant professor. I'm sure that Iowa State can no longer afford to have that kind of student-teacher ratio, but it was glorious fun."

And this from a senior faculty member who is also a distinguished researcher and chairman of his department: "My personal gimmick is that I never accept – from the beginning – a wholly unprofessional piece of work. (The students) rewrite until a professional standard is attained, or at least approached. Hence they are never rewarded for a less than professional job. They are given extensive comments on what the problems are and directed to rewrite – some things three or four times. The final evaluation ranges from Excellent to Acceptable. . .It gets (the students) to act upon their mistakes, not just think about them. They never learn that so-so is good enough, 'considering'. . .(considering that you are a mere student, a tyro, etc.) . . .There is quite a lot of sharing in this. I show how successful solutions nevertheless differ (There is no one standard, no approved solution – but reasons why one treatment is more successful than another)."

Despite their belief in the importance of the course and their evident willingness to invest substantially of their time and effort in it, some of the respondents nonetheless indicated that they felt their work was not always appreciated.

As one senior professor observed: "Writing courses are treated by administrators with the same weight as theory courses, yet editing and commenting on copy for reporting courses takes twice the time as preparation for theory courses."

And another noted: "It is a real problem to be teaching the 'boot camp' courses such as reporting and editing while others talk about Agnew, pornography, Pentagon Papers, etc. Teaching skills courses and demanding near-perfection does not make one as popular as 'rapping' with students.

And from another: "The ANPA has a miserable record of interest in professional training in journalism schools. Medical and law associations do not allow their professional schools to cripple along with inadequate facilities, tools, and overworked staffs. Publishers could demand first class budgets for the schools which do their initial training for them, but will they?"

Both in their answers to the open-ended questions and in amplifying responses to other items in the questionnaire, the respondents showed a willingness to share with their colleagues and others their experience and discoveries in teaching the course. Again, there isn't space in this report for more than a few brief samples.

"Our first course (is) in a three-quarter required sequence. It is team-taught – ratio of 1 to 10 – with 20 students in a section. We are handling it as dealing with basic reporting skills for both print and broadcast media. .One important value of the team approach and the half-day sessions of relatively small sections is the group morale and mutual professionalism built through close, informal interaction. Much of the instructors' time can be spent with individuals and small groups and the students can also benefit from their interaction with each other."

Another respondent, commenting on approaches used, observed: "By far the most effective and dramatic technique I've found is for the instructor to dribble out a news story by bits and pieces, playing various roles the student can use as news sources. Example: A garrulous man calls about finding a body floating in the river. Students 'call' the 'police,' sheriff,' 'medical investigator,' etc., and the story unfolds little by little after much inquiry. They never know how the story is going to turn out (indeed, I seldom know how the story is going to turn out). Sometimes it's a murder, or a suicide, or an accidental drowning; sometimes it's not even a body at all but perhaps an undraped female mannikin. The students seem to enjoy the sense of dramatic intrigue provided by such an assignment (though sometimes the enjoyment is in retrospect) and the instructor is allowed to present a touch of realism (this is, after all, the way a lot of news events unfold) as well as to exhibit a talent for playacting that lay dormant since the high school junior class play."

One teacher noted that "In cooperation with other teachers in newswriting, we have developed a rather elaborate running story which is used as an examination to text the students' ability to recognize news elements, to handle complex details, and to keep abreast of rapid-breaking news."

And another reported that at his institution there is a "small Honors newswriting course. Enrollment is held to 15 or 16 (averages 12) and the class is open only to those who have had considerable experience writing for high school or professional newspapers. . .We take off from a higher plateau, and by the end of the semester students are doing interpretive or in-depth articles. . .We do such things as take them to sessions of the state legislature for two or three days to research and interview for stories. The students, in part, determine what they will do."

And, finally, there were various observations in the category of general philosophical commentary, several of which will serve as examples:

"Writing can be taught or a writer helped only by careful attention to writing itself. Similarly, reporting . . .I think journalism is a distinct profession, and it should be as critical of the jargon of communications as it is of any other jargon."

A department chairman observed: "The chief problems are the failure to engage the whole person in this process. Of course it's tough to teach semi-literates to write, to teach the uninvolved to really take a look at their world, to get a commitment to the reporter's values of honest, unbiased, full disclosure, and a reporter's craft in putting himself in the place of the ignorant but not unintelligent reader – and to enjoy the effort needed to realize all this. None of this is easy. I think that improvement involves mainly getting away from the stereotyped teaching that is implied in many items in the questionnaire. CRT units and computerized retrieval systems and video-taped story situations are things we will experiment with and the students are reading about and these cannot be ignored as the newsroom changes But it still takes a fully involved teacher, working with individuals, to cause anything profound to happen."

And the last: "I've come to the conclusion that students learn reporting best from teachers who have had actual reporting experience. The course should be off-limits for other faculty."

CONCLUSION

When this study was first contemplated, its purpose was seen chiefly as a means of providing to editors and others interested in journalism education some kind of picture of the basic newswriting and reporting course as it is taught at the schools and departments of journalism with sequences accredited by ACEJ. That purpose has to a considerable degree been served.

To be sure, the picture of the basic course that has unfolded on these pages is not a complete picture in all respects. The picture is not complete for several reasons: 1) not all the pertinent questions were asked (despite the great length of the questionnaire used); 2) the questions were put to instructors at only one group of journalism departments and schools – those with sequences accredited by ACEJ; this group numbers a few more than half a hundred, yet there are probably five times that many departments offering programs in journalism at other institutions and; 3) the questions were put to only one party to the complex interrelationship that constitutes a learning situation; no input was obtained from the students who are the immediate consumers of the course.

These considerations do not invalidate the findings of the study so far as its initial purpose is concerned. But they do suggest that the study may represent the beginning stage of a somewhat different, more ambitious undertaking.

Any field of professional activity – certainly any educational endeavor – ought to engage in periodic re-examination of what it is attempting to accomplish, how it is going about the job, why it is doing whatever it is doing, and how well it is achieving its objective.

The kind of detailed look at the basic newswriting and reporting course that this study represents could well be followed by additional investigations. It might be rewarding, for example, to make a study of the basic newswriting course at a few selected schools, posing similar sets of questions both to the instructors of those courses and to representative samples of students who have taken the courses recently and alumni who had taken them a few years ago. That would add some dimensions to the picture of how the course approaches and achieves its objectives.

It might be equally useful to extend the scope of the examination to schools and departments without accredited programs, to see how their approaches compare with those of the schools that are presumably among the best-staffed and the best-supported in the country.

And it might be appropriate to expand the effort yet further, to extend the scope of the re-examination to other cornerstone courses in the journalism education curriculum, even to the specialized offerings for advanced students.

This present study, while fulfilling its initial mission of assembling the basis for an informational description of a single keystone course in the journalism curriculum, could also perhaps represent a small beginning on the larger re-examination from which the entire field of journalism education could significantly benefit.